

# New Project Aims to Change Indian Men's Attitudes toward Women

Alexis Glassman  
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A new IFES project aims to change the attitudes of young Indian men toward women, transforming them from “potential perpetrators” of abuse and female inequality to the protectors of women’s rights. The project, “Youth Forums Against Gender Based Violence,” was launched in June in Karnataka.

IFES is working with an Indian nongovernmental organization, the Independent Commission for People’s Rights and Development, on the new project. The commission’s member secretary, Dr. Nandini Azad, talked about the importance of the initiative at IFES’ Washington headquarters on July 10.

Gender bias is common in many third-world nations, but it is especially notable among impoverished regions in countries like India and China. Domestic violence, sex-selection abortions and neglect of female children are a few examples of the gender bias practices often seen in India’s patriarchal society. IFES, with the support of USAID, is working to eliminate such practices and ensure equal rights in democratic societies through its Gender and Law initiative.



Dr. Nandini Azad talked about the importance of the new IFES initiative.

The youth forums currently are identifying youth leaders who will then talk to their peers about how to identify and prevent domestic violence. The program includes discussion about traditional gender roles and women’s equality in a democratic society.

Azad said the program has already met with some resistance.

“In one village there was stoning,” she said, explaining that some villagers threw small pebbles in protest of a public discussion that involved sexual content. No one was injured and the villagers eventually came to understand and accept the program’s main message.

Azad said the program’s strength comes from the women mentors who reside in the local villages of Karnataka and Rajasthan. Field researchers have been able to collaborate with local civil society organizations to identify local youth in 120 villages who seemed responsive to the project and work with them to clarify sexual attitudes, answer questions and support their changing perspectives.

The program also uses street theater performances to get its gender equality message across. In one instance, a member of parliament participated in one of these skits that showed how families treat female and male children differently. The parliament member taught the family to treat the female child equally by taking her broom and sweeping for her, then teaching her how to read.

“That’s a big thing for us,” said Azad. “That was breaking patriarchy.”

Azad said she believes one way to solve the issue of female inequality in India is to encourage female employment. She said that if more women have jobs, they will have a stronger position from which to sensitize their male children and convince society of the importance of women’s rights and equality.